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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUCOWCA/COGARD MIO EUROPE ROTTERDAM NL
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUCOCGA/COMLANTAREA COGARD PORTSMOUTH VA
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1132

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COTONOU 000561

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: PORT OF COTONOU: UPDATE ON DEMARCHE CONCERNING ISPS CODE
COMPLIANCE

REF: COTONOU 389

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. On July 24, 2007, United States Coast Guard (USCG) Lieutenant Commander Robert Keith, Charge d'Affaires J.A. Diffily, and Millennium Challenge Corporation Benin Acting Resident Country Director Randall Wood met with officials from the Port of Cotonou and the Beninese Merchant Marine to assess progress made pursuant to the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code demarche delivered to the Government of Benin on May 21 (Reftel). That demarche outlined numerous deficiencies at the Port of Cotonou and gave the GOB ninety days to meet the minimum requirements of the ISPS Code and avoid inclusion on the Port Security Advisory List. A tour of the port indicated that relatively little progress has been made, and that a great deal of work needs to be done if the August 21 deadline specified in the demarche is to be met. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Christophe Aguessy, General Director of the Port of Cotonou, was the principal GOB representative at the meeting. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were also present. The Minister of Transportation and Public Works, whose ministry is responsible for the port, sent his regrets. Mr. Aguessy opened the meeting by thanking the USG for its involvement in efforts to improve the Port of Cotonou and its willingness to provide feedback prior to the expiration of the 90-day period specified in the demarche. He distributed a timeline chart showing progress (or lack thereof) for each activity intended to ensure compliance with the ISPS code. According to the timeline, few of the activities will be completed before August 21, and even the purchase of and installation of signs noting demarcated zones, perhaps the simplest and least difficult of the required tasks, showed an expected completion date of September 30, 2007. Several other activities, including the extension of the south perimeter wall, the heightening of several perimeter walls, and improved lighting, are scheduled for completion as late as September or October. To cite a particularly worrisome example, the heightening of the south perimeter wall has not yet begun, and even the process of engaging a construction company to heighten the wall is not scheduled to begin until the last week of July, and the procurement process alone is scheduled to extend well past the August 21 deadline.

¶3. Lieutenant Commander Keith thanked Mr. Aguessy for his presentation and efforts made to date, but noted that the Port of Cotonou is still far from being in compliance with ISPS code with only four weeks remaining before the deadline. He further noted that certification would be based on performance, not plans or good

intentions. He pointed out that many of the ISPS specifications do not require lengthy procurement processes, such as posting guards at perimeter areas where the wall has not yet been extended, and initiating a publicity campaign to inform the public of security requirements that will limit public access to port facilities. He also questioned why so little progress had been made since September 2006, when the United States Coast Guard made its initial assessment of the Port of Cotonou, and why the GOB had apparently waited until the delivery of the formal demarche, and its 90-day deadline, before beginning to implement improvements.

¶4. Lieutenant Commander Keith then reiterated the likely consequences of the Port of Cotonou not meeting ISPS code by August 21. These would include the Port of Cotonou being placed on the Port Security Advisory List, which would place additional requirements on ships wishing to dock at Cotonou, as well as leading to possible increased insurance costs and a potential decline in ship traffic and revenue. He ended by expressing his hope that the GOB and USG could work together to insure that ISPS requirements are met by the deadline, and cited some positive accomplishments, such as identification badges being provided for many key staff members, additional gendarmes to help patrol the port facility, and the division of the port into five different zones, which have been demarcated on the ground using concrete monuments and painted lines.

¶5. After the meeting, Port of Cotonou staff accompanied the USG personnel on a long tour of the port, designed to showcase the progress that had been made. The staff pointed out several new concrete perimeter walls which had been built, such as one next to the eastern jetty where the dry bulk carriers dock, and the USG personnel observed a three-person work crew in place along the south perimeter, mixing concrete to begin construction of a wall there.

¶6. (SBU) However, many of the same deficiencies noted in the U.S. Coast Guard's previous inspection remain, and it was evident that

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several measures had been enacted purely for the benefit of the USG visitors. For example, the three-person work crew had obviously started working only hours before, and were still clearing vegetation from the site with hand tools. While the port's different zones were demarcated, no effort was being made to prevent entry to any of the zones, and the concrete monuments were all but invisible unless you knew where to look for them. Hundreds of unidentifiable persons milled around the port, filling up water jugs from the port's basin, and sleeping or eating under vehicles. No visible efforts were being made to identify or control these persons, and at one point security personnel did not challenge a person who entered the port from the beach wearing a jacket over his head. Few of the people within the port facilities had badges or any clearly identifiable need to be in the port area. Drying laundry around the port perimeter and cooking fires suggest that many of these unauthorized persons have spent long periods of time within the port facility. At least fifty trucks were parked in the southwest area of the port facility, with their drivers and crews playing cards in the shade, sleeping, or making tea on charcoal fires. Several motorcycles loaded with jugs of gasoline or water, presumably for sale within the port, entered without being challenged.

¶7. (SBU) At the front gate, the USG team witnessed port security staff turning away people who had no badges, but it was immediately clear by the growing backlog of people, their confusion about why they were being turned away, and the large volume of people exiting the port facility, that this sudden enforcement of port policy had been staged for the USG's benefit. An embassy staff member who was traveling on the road next to the port at that time confirmed that the suddenly strict access controls caused a major traffic jam of trucks and other vehicles on the road.

¶8. (SBU) Ms. Rahanatou Anki Dosso, Director of the Merchant Marine, offered many excuses for the current state of the port facilities and repeatedly promised that the port would meet the August 21 deadline for ISPS compliance, but it soon became evident that she had no clear idea of what ISPS compliance entailed. When questioned

about several problems at the port, she replied that the situation either posed no problem, or that it was not the responsibility of her office. For example, when questioned about a barbed wire fence that had fallen into disrepair, she replied that she did not think that this mattered in terms of ISPS compliance, and considered it normal for fences to rust and deteriorate. Earlier, Mr. Aguessy had stated that it was pointless to string barbed wire, because "people will just cut it." He had no response when asked why his security people could not prevent this from happening.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: The lack of progress toward ISPS compliance is worrisome, especially considering the importance of the Port of Cotonou to the economy of Benin. Also troubling is the fact that in many cases correcting the noted deficiencies would not require large capital investments and is often more a matter of willpower and determination than money. During the July 24 meeting, and in a subsequent follow-up meeting on July 25 with General Director Aguessy and other GOB officials, Lieutenant Commander Keith and Embassy officers stressed the seriousness of ISPS compliance and the urgency with which the GOB must address the shortcomings outlined in the demarche of May 21. They also emphasized that it is concrete results which will count, not good intentions or honest efforts. END COMMENT.

Lauterbach